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No Talks Can Be Held At Gunpoint, Says Arjun Singh

Bloodshed In Punjab Could Be Avoided If Rajiv-Longowal Accord Had Been Implemented

According to Union Human Resources Development Minister Arjun Singh, "a democratically elected government cannot talk to the people at gunpoint." Now that the assembly poll has been held in Punjab and the democratic process restored, "all matters should be settled through the democratic means". He was sure that Sardar Beant Singh would play his role well.

This declaration, made at Kisan rally at Muktsar, in Faridkot district, on December 6, is a slap on the face of the Punjab

chief minister who has always maintained that Punjab is essentially and solely a law and order problem and has to be settled

through the barrel of a gun. The idea of negotiations is alien to him.

Mr Arjun Singh, who was the architect of the Rajiv-Longowal accord of July 24, 1985, said if the accord had been implemented, bloodshed in the state would have been averted during the past six years. He, however, declined to disclose who was responsible for the non-implementation of the accord and how its implementa-

tion was stalled. He merely said "history will expose them."

The Kisan rally, organised by Sardar Jagmeet Singh Brar, a member of Lok Sabha from Patna, was a resounding success. Farmers flocked to the rally in trucks, buses and tractor-trolleys.

The Beant Singh ministry tried to sabotage the rally. The

(Continued on next page)

Ban On Five Communal Organisations May Be Difficult To Implement

Secularism Has To Be Genuine And Not Of So-Called Variety

The ban imposed by the central government on five "communal organisations" has evoked mixed reaction. All political parties, except for BJP, have welcomed the move, calling it a positive step, a means to an end of suffocating communal frenzy. But as the taste of the pudding lies in its eating, similarly the efficacy of the ban will lie in its implementation.

The two Muslim organisations, Jamaat-e-Islami and Islamic Sevak Sangh, had to be lumped together with rabid outfits like Bajrang Dal, Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh and Vishwa Hindu Parishad just to give the impression of equisense and impartiality. Otherwise, the Jamaat-e-Islami, despite its fundamentalist policies, was not much of a thunder while RSS took its birth as counterblast to BJP attempt to unleash Kerala Hindus against the Mopla Muslims there. Actually, it was the three Hindu bodies which were holding the country to ransom and threatening all non-Hindus with dire consequences.

Bajrang Dal was the most virulent of the lot. Its posters plastered all over Uttar Pradesh

and in booklets distributed throughout the country, it sought the decimation of all minorities. It asked the Muslims to "pack up and go to Pakistan, their dreamland". It described the Sikhs as "demons" who must be obliterated as they were "stealing prosperity" from the Hindus. The Christians were asked to return to the fold of their old faith, Hinduism.

What VHP, Bajrang Dal, and RSS activists did at Ayodhya on December 6 was abominable, a blasphemous, a perfidy, which made India's prestige all over the world tumbling down in a jiffy. It has been rightly lampooned by all editors, most of whom are Hindus.

The arrests of leaders and the ban on these communal organisations militate against our democratic traditions. But there was no alternative in the present instance because of the threats to political order, secularism and unity between various segments of our society by these organisations. Anyway, the authority of the state has come down heavily on all those who lighted the communal fuse and who tried to defy the constitutional order.

The enormous difficulties in enforcing the ban must not be overlooked. This is more so with RSS which has an extensive network and whose members are in an upbeat mood. It claims a registered membership of 25 lakhs. They hold 25,000 "shakhas" (meetings by picketised volunteers) and 70,000 sub-shakhas every day. They glorify not only Hinduism but also denude other faiths.

There is nothing to prevent their rabid communalists from meeting in private houses over a cup of tea.

RSS has come under similar ban twice before. The first was just after Mahatma Gandhi's assassination. But that action did not weaken either the organisation or the will of the killers.

When Mrs Indira Gandhi banned both the RSS and Jamaat-e-Islami, among other outfits, during the emergency in 1975, they emerged as best of friends, merely because the aim of the fundamentalists of all hues and creeds is essentially the same.

Also banned organisations, like banned books, arouse more curiosity and interest.

The best way to counter their threat is to educate public opinion about the inherent dangers posed by them and the formation of a secular front with all like-minded parties. The prime minister is very right in his assertion that the "country will go to pieces if we leave the path of secularism". But it has to be genuine secularism and not of the so-called variety.

district administration, apparently on order from the above, barricaded all roads leading to Muktsar. The organisers alleged that some farmers were prevented from taking part in the rally by the government. But the deputy inspector-general of police, Ferozepore range, clarified that the police had not stopped anyone from going to the rally but had only regulated traffic.

An abortive attempt was made to disturb the rally when Mr Arjun Singh was speaking. A few persons tried to show black flags to him but were prevented from doing so and were led away from the venue. There was a minor scuffle also and the turban of a person fell down. There was commotion for some time in the pandal but the whole thing subsided after Sardar Brar made an appeal to people to stay calm and listen to Mr Arjun Singh.

The rally is a shot in the arm of Sardar Brar. Addressing it, he repeated what he has been saying all along that there was need for taking the political initiative to solve the Punjab problem, as bullets were no solution.

This was just a reiteration of what he had said in the Lok Sabha earlier. He wanted the prime minister to visit the Golden Temple and "feel sorry" for Operation Bluebird of June 1984 in which the Akal Takht was destroyed. He also demanded quick action against those who were involved in the massacre of 4,000 Sikhs in Delhi in 1984.

His confirmed belief is that political initiative is the only way to end the alienation of Sikhs and bring the tortured and harassed people back into the national mainstream. At the same time, he has given full credit to the chief minister for containing militancy in the state.

But Sardar Brar's pleading have been very galling to Sardar Beant Singh. In a fit of anger, he asked his spongers, Sardar Harcharan Singh Hero, acting president of Pradesh Congress committee, to issue a show-cause notice to Sardar Brar, asking him why he should not be expelled for "anti-party activities". But before the notice period was over, he was expelled from Congress (I) for six years.

Now this expulsion has been stayed by the AICC(U).

This is another blow to the chief minister who had unnecessarily stepped into the domain which is not his. Because no MP can be expelled only by the Congress working committee and not by a Pradesh committee.

Referring to his expulsion, Sardar Brar said he had served the Congress party with dedication and contested elections against Sardar Prakash Singh Budol, former chief minister and president of his faction of Akalis, and Devi Lal, when he was president of the Samajwadi party, as a soldier of Congress party. He declared at the Kanan rally: "I have great respect for Sardar Beant Singh. But if it is a shot to fight for the rights of the people, I will devote my life to the cause of the people." This declaration

received a thunderous applause.

Said he: "I shall neither leave the Congress whose ideology I adhere to, nor shall I allow Sardar Hero to undermine it. He came only recently from the Akali ranks while I belong to Congress ever since I took to active politics."

For the time being, Sardar Beant Singh had to eat the humble pie. But this shows what an early turn the rift in Punjab Congress (I) has taken.

NOTICE

We regret that due to recent disturbed conditions in Northern India and imposition of curfew in walled city and the Trans-Jamuna area we could not bring out our issue dated 14th December, 1992.

We may also add here that our next issue will be Guru Gobind Singh Number which will be posted to our esteemed readers before the 31st December, which is the birth day of the Tenth Master.

Readers may please note.

List Of Selected Books By Dr. Gopal Singh

(The Celebrated Writer and Poet and
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SIKHS AND AYODHYA

The tragic events at Ayodhya on December 6, when the 464-year-old Babri Masjid was razed to the ground by Hindu fanatical kar sevaks, have benumbed the Sikhs much more than other non-Muslim minorities and they have begun again to think seriously about their fate in a Hindu-dominated country. For the SGPC executive to allege that the Babri Masjid was demolished by certain communal organisations "in connivance with the government of India under a deep-rooted conspiracy to suppress the minorities in the country" may be far-fetched in eyes of some but it does reflect the intrinsic fears of the community. Most significantly, it has forced even the safer and secular sections of the Sikhs to see in the demolition a clear proof of the arrogance of the Hindu fundamentalists and their designs to bludgeon the minorities into utter subjugation to the Hindu will. The demolition has also provided sinews to the case of Sikh militants that the future of the community is not safe in the present setup. The Sikh fundamentalists have also received props, though, unwittingly, from their Hindu counterparts.

The Sikhs also go back to Operation Blue Star which involved army invasion of the Golden Temple complex and 45 other historic gurdwaras in Punjab. True, the holy complex had been fortified by Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and his followers. Here the Masjid was standing alone with no inmates, bellhouse or passive, inside it, the only threat was mounted by the kar sevaks. Now the Sikhs have every right to ask: Why was not the army used to dislodge the kar sevaks when both Intelligence Bureau reports and advice given by former Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar and West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu clearly indicated that the mosque would be demolished? Or is it that the army and the paramilitary forces are to be used only against the minorities and their shrines and not against the majority community? New Delhi's is pseudo-secularism.

The real villains of the piece are the BJP leaders and their ministry in Uttar Pradesh headed by Mr Kalyan Singh. All of them gave solemn assurances in parliament and to the supreme court that no harm would be done to the disputed structure. And yet the chief minister had given clear instructions to the state police that no force was to be used; when the central forces moved towards Ayodhya from Faizabad, though very late in the day, they were asked to go back by the district magistrate. The way the kar sevaks blocked the roads with burning tyres and trucks and water tankers clearly shows that the demolition was pre-planned by the task force specially trained for the job. Denials by the BJP leaders lack credibility. For Mr Lal Krishan Advani to dismiss the tragedy just as "unfortunate" is not enough. He and men of his ilk should be hauled over the coals and made to pay for their perfidy. Only then the minorities shall be convinced that fascism of fanatical Hindus has been adequately contained.

The saga of the brave fight and martyrdom of elder Sahibzadas is unique and no parallel in world history. Never have princes in their teens displayed such cool courage in the face of death. Their heroic deeds to fight tyranny and defend their faith are written in letters of gold.

THE CHAMKAUR SAGA

In the village of Chamkaur, a Jat cultivator had built a big house. The house, though built of mud, was spacious enough to house Guru Gobind Singh and the Sikhs, who could use it as a fortress to fight the enemy from within. The owner of the house handed it over to the Guru. The blessed people of this celebrated places served the Guru and the Sikhs heartily with food and clothes.

The enemy forces surrounded the Cultivator's House completely during the night itself and started fierce attacks on the morning of 22nd December, 1704. The commanders of the invading forces had known that the Guru was accompanied by 40 Sikhs only and taken refuge in the Cultivator's House. The enemy was confident that the Guru would be subdued easily. The Guru organised the defence inside the House in such a way that the Sikhs could repulse any attack from any

The Princes Martyred

The Guru had appointed Baba Ajit Singh and Baba Jujhar Singh (his sons) as commanders of the two contingents, which went to go out of the House to give a hand-to-hand fight to the enemy. Baba Ajit Singh was seventeen years of age and Baba Jujhar Singh was of fifteen years. The two Princes, who led their respective contingents, left the House on their turn. The Guru willingly sent his sons to the battlefield and beheld them fighting most valiantly and receiving martyrdom most heroically. The Guru cherished a deep and insatiable love for the people and sacrificed his sons for their emancipation from the shackles of religious, cultural, social and political servitude. The Guru sent out Sikhs in groups to fight the hordes of the enemy troops. The Sikhs engaged the enemy for a considerable long time before

Martyrdom day of elder Sahibzadas of Guru Gobind Singh, Baba Ajit Singh and Baba Jujhar Singh falls on 22nd December.

side of the House. Valleys after valleys of shooting arrows from the House were discharged which completely discouraged the enemy from entering the House or damaging it. Many enemy soldiers were hit by the missiles discharged by the Guru and the Sikhs and were laid to eternal rest. Till sufficient ammunition was available inside the House, there was no loss of life. The enemy had no artillery power at this time as the guns could not be moved across the first stream.

Hand-to-Hand Fighting

The stock of ammunition and missiles in the House was near about exhausted. Those were the shortest winter days and it was now past afternoon. There was still two to three hours daylight left. It was then decided to engage the enemy in a hand-to-hand fight. The Guru divided his men into a number of groups, each of which was to go out and fight with the enemy with their sabres, spears and lances. When men of one group was martyred, another contingent was sent out. Occasionally arrows were also discharged by the Guru to keep the enemy at bay from the House.

they were cornered and came to death. The Princes too exhibited their courage and valour and fell.

The memorable day of 22nd December, 1704 will ever remain fresh to the memory of all people of all climes and regions who believe in the inalienable right of all humans to cherish freedom. The Guru stood for humanism and was fighting in self defence against the dark forces of ignorance and obscurantism. He believed in the nobleness of the humanity based on the true meaning of human freedom, for which he set a matchless example. A shrine stands now at the place of the Cultivator's House and is called 'Gurbi Sahib'. Inside this shrine is a small Gurdwara called 'Tilak Ashan'. It was here Guru Gobind Singh appointed the Khalsa Panth as his successor and brought to an end the individual leadership (Gurship) of the community by creation of the Collective Leadership for all times to come. Where the contingents of the Sikhs fell whilst fighting including the Guru's own sons, now stands a shrine called 'Katal Garh Sahib'. A big fair is held here on 22nd of December every year.

THE AYODHYA OUTRAGE

The Sikh Reaction

By : HARCHARAN BAINS

Even as the incredible events in Ayodhya on Sunday have traumatised all sensitive minds in the country, they have left the minorities completely shell shocked. These events are likely to have a serious impact on the psychological climate in the sensitive border states of Punjab and Kashmir.

In Punjab, where the Sikhs are still recovering from the shattering impact of Operation Blue Star of 1984, the Ayodhya outrage is bound to deliver a grievous blow to the secular and nation first sentiment, especially among the Sikhs. Parallels are bound to be drawn between the traumatic army action in the Golden Temple night years ago and the demolition of the Babri mosque. Already both these actions are being seen as proof of the brutal arrogance of the fundamentalist fringe of the Hindu majority and of its alleged designs to bludgeon the minorities into submission.

The average Sikh has reacted with a mixture of anguish and indignation at the events, which, in his view, were emotionally avoidable if the sane voice in the majority community had asserted itself more forcefully. The community is not totally oblivious of the differences between the Operation Blue Star and the ghastly developments at Ayodhya, but the differences serve to deepen its sense of alienation from the national cause. For one, the Golden Temple was heavily fortified by the armed followers of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, while the mosque was completely at the mercy of the government. No Muslim fundamentalist had entrenched himself there. So there was no perceived danger to national unity from its continued existence.

This has strengthened the Sikh suspicion that army action in Ayodhya would have taken place anyway and that the presence of militants inside the temple came in handy as an excuse. The real objective of Operation Blue Star, as of the demolition of the mosque, was to assert the physical pre-eminence of the Hindu majority and to humiliate the minorities. Few Sikhs differ with this perception and the loss of Sikh faith (or whatever was left of it) in Indian secularism has been badly bruised.

The events are a major setback to the voices of sanity in the Sikh community as the extremist propaganda about "Hindu communalism" has been so forcefully vindicated. The militants and their supporters have suddenly discovered a new ideological weapon in their arsenal and the militant sentiment and ideology

that had recently been pushed to the periphery has forced its way to the centre stage. Thus, Ayodhya has given a new lease of life to the militant ideology in Punjab and the Sikh fundamentalists have received powerful support from where they least expected it—their Hindu counterparts.

The Sikh mind is beset with a number of questions which the sane voices in the community would find hard to answer. For instance, it is hard to explain why the army, which has been present in full strength in Punjab for years now, could not be deployed at Ayodhya to protect the masjid.

Why could not an operation like Operation Blue Star be ordered to evict kar sevaks from near the site while it was simply clear in advance that the frenzied crowds would try to demolish the mosque?

Why were hundreds of thousands of kar sevaks—a euphemism for communally charged Hindus—allowed to gather at the site and thus pose a danger to the mosque in the first place?

Why could the Kalyan Singh government not be sacked earlier for colluding with extremist and communal elements, just as the Akali governments in Punjab have reportedly been?

Ironically, while the common Sikh is anguished at what happened on that fateful day, those having militant leanings are exulting over the conduct of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the RSS and the BJP because these organisations appear to have armed the Sikh radicals with an invincible argument. The latter had nearly

run out of ideological steam when Ayodhya events came as a Godsend.

Even some serious Sikh scholars express grave apprehensions about the "growing Hinduisation of the country", as they put it. One of them put it to me with palpable anguish in his voice: "Perhaps, the Hindus don't want us any longer. They want to limit India to themselves alone. If it leads to the frightful prospect of disintegration, what will the likes of me go? Between a communally created 'Khalistan' and a similarly carved out India, does a secular Sikh have a choice? I will probably run away to some western country in case of such an eventuality."

The BJP's refusal to abide by the Supreme Court verdict on the Ayodhya issue has really shocked the Sikhs. "How could a party that dubbed us as traitors simply because we did not believe in the constitutional framework so openly make the Constitution, the rule of law and the judiciary mere objects of ridicule, all in the name of Indian nationalism?" Why cannot their leaders now be booked under the TADA, the NSA and similar laws, just as we were jailed under these?" a very senior Akali leader asked me on Monday afternoon.

There are also those who are cynically amused at the developments. "We do not need to get our boys killed to get 'Khalistan'. They will themselves break up this country and we will get our share," said a senior retired army personnel.

But most Sikhs would like the Ayodhya frenzy to end, the mosque to be rebuilt (not by the government but by Muslim religious leadership and those guilty of its demolition to be severely punished. They empathise with Muslims in this harrowing experience, but would like them

to exercise restraint and calm to avert a major communal catastrophe.

All in all, the Ayodhya disgrace has (a) helped the anti-national cause in Punjab, (b) strengthened the hold of fundamentalist and militant ideology, (c) weakened and isolated the sane, secular and national Sikh, (d) increased the potential of Pakistan to create trouble in this country, particularly in the border states and (e) dealt a severe blow to the gradual secularisation of Sikh politics.

Not all is lost. There have been positive helpful signs which need to be highlighted and obvious steps that must be taken to re-establish, in whatever measure possible, the tenuous secular credentials of India as a country. Among the helpful signs that need to be projected are: (a) a forceful and forthright manner in which the media in the country came down upon the BJP's communal brand of politics. Editors, most of them Hindus, have risen like one man to condemn the vandalism indulged in by the BJP. Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Bajrang Dal, RSS workers, etc; the media has struck a forceful blow for sanity and secularism, (b) the role of the non-BJP opposition parties. Mr V.P. Singh, Mr Chandra Shekhar, R.B. Pawar, all the Left parties and leaders and even some Congressmen have been forthright in condemning the events in Ayodhya. Muslims in this country are not without friends in the majority community, friends who have dared to stick their necks out and be counted, even in this communally charged atmosphere.

Highlighting of these can also have a deep impact on the psycho-social scene in Punjab. Perhaps, in order to put our staggering secular structure back on its feet, we would do well to (a) observe December 6 as a day of National Repentance every year, (b) initiate quick and exemplary legal action against the culprits, (c) persuade our Prime Minister to apologise to the nation, particularly to Muslims, for the heinous outrage committed against them, (d) ban all communal or communally inspired organisations and (e) observe the coming Sunday as a day of official national mourning to democratic and secular ideals.

Here is a grave challenge before the country. And a great opportunity before it to prove to the minorities, once and for all, that where communal madness is concerned the nation will be as severe on the majority vandalism as on the minority maverick elements. Such a proof of impartiality is badly needed in Punjab, as indeed in the rest of the country. Or will the BJP be allowed to go on interpreting equality before law as an opprobrium of the minorities?



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Misreading signals from Punjab

By : S.S. GILL, Former Secretary, Information & Broadcasting

The participation of nearly 70 per cent of the registered voters in the elections to the 91 civic bodies of Punjab was the best news to come from that Jinxed State for a long time. It revived the hopes for a fresh breakthrough in dealing with militancy and some sort of a "package" was supposed to be assembled by the Centre for this purpose. And in concrete terms, there was the daily toll of top militants being liquidated one after the other.

The occasions seemed to be ripe for a major political initiative. But we kept waiting—and are still waiting, for Goda to materialise. Earlier also Delhi had let slip several such opportunities. But unlike the previous occasions, this time it may not be so much a case of dithering, as of misreading the signals from Punjab. This will need some explaining.

There is no harm in the Centre making the Anandpur Sahib resolution the basis for settling the Punjab problem.

The civic elections in question were not a State-wide phenomenon. They were confined to the urban areas which constitute about one-third of the State. Secondly, whereas the Sikhs form 62 per cent of the population of Punjab, nearly two-thirds of the urban people are Hindus. Thirdly, the Congress(I) nominees won a little over 400 of the total of 1,300 seats at stake in these elections. The Chief Minister's claim that of the 300 independent candidates supported by his party, 298 got elected was presumably meant to raise a laugh in a situation where you do not have much to laugh about.

There is no way to construe these results as a victory for the Congress. (1) But they definitely prove that the heart of Punjab is still in the right place. Whereas this position will be clear to any hard-headed politician, there are two factors which may distort our political perspective. One is the recent spectacular success of the State police in liquidating a number of high-profile militants, and second, the perception of the Punjab Chief Minister of these happenings.

Soon after assuming office, Beant Singh made it quite explicit that the Punjab problem was essentially a law and order issue (though later these views were

reputed, presumably on advice from better informed quarters). He permitted the police to go ahead full throttle, and this approach did produce immediate results. The Chief Minister, assured by his police chief, seems to be confident of breaking the back of these terrorists in not too distant a future. The strategy, therefore, seems to be that when that happens, the Centre will come up with a political package, more or less a reformulated version of the Rajiv Gandhi-Longowal accord, to solve the Punjab tangle.

This approach may look very neat, and also create the comforting illusion that for once the Government is in command of the situation. But this will be much too simplistic a view of a highly complex issue, and the Central leadership at least must be aware of its limitations. Even if we eliminate all the terrorists

physical. Whereas the emotional side would take a long time to heal, the physical injury is immediate and rankles under the ribs all the time.

The State Government's excessive reliance on its police has given this coercive force a measure of autonomy which is just not permissible in any civilised society. Sandwiched between the terrorism of the militants and that of the police, the people of Punjab are leading a very insecure and miserable life. The surest way for the State Government to improve its credibility is to place effective curbs on the unbridled activities of the police and restore a degree of normal civil administration. The extent to which the police will be shot in Punjab may be judged from the recent decision of the State to launch "Operation Civil Action", under which senior police officers, accompanied by Deputy Commissioners, etc., pay fortnightly visits to various districts to address public grievances and ensure proper implementation of the development programmes. A more sappy tawny scheme of things is difficult to imagine.

The lasting solution to the Punjab problem, as that of several other troubled States, lies in the restructuring of the Centre-State relations. Over-centralisation of the Indian polity has stifled too long the legitimate regional and ethnic aspirations, and the poor performance of centralised planning has eroded the legitimacy of the centralist model. For years now this issue has been pushing itself to the fore of the political agenda. The appointment of the Sarkaria Commission was only a mild recognition of this fact. The Commission's report itself makes a forceful attempt to come to grips with the basic question of decentralisation. The delay in facing up to the unpleasant realities has lost an increasing momentum to the movements for regional autonomy all over the country. And the frustration arising from the failure to make any headway is forcing them on to the separatist path.

It is in this context that the Centre should have a fresh look at the Anandpur Sahib resolution. Despite all the ill-informed publicity, it will be seen that it is not at all secessionist in intent, and the word *Khalistan* does not occur in it anywhere. It urges the Centre to "re-examine the constitutional structure of the country on real and meaningful federal principles to obviate the possibility of any danger to the unity

of the country and, further, to enable the States to play a useful role for the progress and prosperity of the Indian people in their respective areas by a meaningful exercise of their powers." The resolution nowhere states that only three or four subjects should be retained by the Centre, nor it contains the much maligned expression "Raj Karega Khalsa". (As there is some confusion about the "authorised version" of this resolution, I have used the version approved by the All-India Akali Conference held at Ludhiana on October 28-29, 1978. This is also the version reproduced in Government of India's "White Paper on the Punjab agitation", dated July (6, 1984).

In view of these facts where is the harm in the Centre offering to make the Anandpur Sahib resolution the basis for settling the Punjab problem? Whereas the very mention of Rajiv Gandhi-Longowal accord makes the backles of the Sikhs rise, a reference to the resolution immediately strikes a sympathetic chord. Moreover, the Akalis have so repeatedly made this resolution the basis of their demands, that they would have no excuse to back out in case such an offer is made to them. And this is an exercise with which most political parties would happily associate themselves as, ultimately, the question of Centre-State relations will have to be examined in the overall national context.

There is no running away from the fact that the Sikhs had developed a deep distrust of the Nehru-Gandhi family. Now, with the change of guard at the Centre and the installation of an elected Government in the State, an excellent opportunity has arisen to make a determined bid to restore normality in Punjab. But it will be a national tragedy to miss it owing to the misreading of the signals coming from that hapless State. The highest priority should now be given to lessening the rigours of the police rule. The people will tend to forget about the narrow electoral base of the Beant Singh Government once he enables them to breathe more freely. And the next step should be to seize the political initiative by offering to bring the Anandpur Sahib resolution to the centrestage of the negotiations. And once the ice is broken, the other awkward issues like the sharing of the river waters, exchange of territories and transfer of Chaudhary could also be thrashed out.

Proposed Human Rights' Commission

By : Prof. DALIP SINGH

The Government of India is, seemingly, in the process of constituting a Human Rights Commission (HRC) in India. The Chief Ministers' Conference have agreed for it, though, interestingly, several Chief Ministers were conspicuous for their absence. In the very first meeting, convened to deliberate, further on the proposed Commission. However, the meeting went ahead with the agenda. The avowed objective of H.R.C. though not clear, so far, in the absence of availability of official documents pertaining to, the specific proposals of Government of India, as well as the views and the decisions of Chief Ministers' Conference on H.R.C.

The picture is a bit hazy. The little that has surfaced in the press statements of Home Minister, evidently indicate that, it is not the concern or sensitivity on violation of human rights in India, that prompted the government to initiate process for H.R.C. but, instead, the Government of India through this Commission, intends to dispel the adverse impression of its prestige, abroad, and to counteract the effects of the various damaging reports of International Human Rights Organisations, on large scale violations of human rights in India. The proposed H.R.C. may be an "Operation Cover Up" to extricate the government from the present impasse on human rights and to discredit these international organisations for their unpalatable reports to Indian Government.

The International Organisations like Amnesty International, Asia Watch and others, through their painstaking, minute observations of Newspapers in India and through their own reliable means, collect and monitor, more or less credible evidence and cases, which, in fact, is a small fraction of the real situation, make startling revelations on tortures, rapes, custody crimes such as encounters (fake), custody rapes and custody deaths etc. in their frequent periodical reports, published and distributed throughout the world, India Government of India and state governments of almost all the states for their dismal failure to protect and respect the human rights and lives from the mostly de-humanised security forces in India.

It is also understood that almost all the Loan Donor countries, influenced by above referred reports and the information, they have gathered of their own resources, on the state of Human Rights in India, exert strong pressure on the Indian government

to rectify the situation and to take remedial measures to restore the validity and sanctity of human rights in India.

In USA, Canada and other European countries the political parties and the Parliaments of those countries have powerful cells consisting of distinguished and judicious minds, to monitor the state of human rights in their own countries and countries of the world. These cells are the most potent guarantee, to the citizens at large, in protection of their rights. The sensitivity and concern of these institutions deter the governments to violate the rights of the citizens and the weak groups of these cells have the right and they frequently visit police and jails to meet prisoners and detainees, to interview them, on the spot, on the treatment meted out to them, irrespective of the nature of crime, they are alleged to have committed. The press is very sensitive and vigilant and have its own agencies to investigate cases of violations of the human rights by the state apparatus and security forces.

Besides ensuring the protection of human rights in their own countries, these international agencies and cells watch the state of human rights in other countries and powerfully influence the policy of their Governments on foreign affairs and bilateral relations between their country and the other countries. Their voice is potentially a determining factor in sanctioning of foreign aid and disbursement of other help like arms to foreign governments.

All these international organisations and parliamentary human rights cells are extremely critical of India government's handling of various movements and express denial of human rights in this country. All this impelled Government of India to find out reliable and acceptable, credible ways and means to create a favourable impression abroad, to secure and ensure the free flow of foreign capital and other help. The proposal for H.R.C. emanated from these external impulsions. How far and to what extent these objectives of the governments would be realised through the proposed H.R.C. is anybody's guess.

There are many civil rights organisations which include the Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee (APCLC), the Association for the Protection of Democratic Rights (APDR), Calcutta, the Civil Liberties and Human Rights Organisations (CLAHRO), Manipal, Citizens for Democratic Rights, (CDR)

(Delhi), the Committee for Protection of Democratic Rights (CPDR) Bombay, the Free Legal Aid Committee, (FLAC) Bihar, the Jammu and Kashmir People's Movement for Human Rights, Protection Committee, the Nagas People's Union for Civil Liberties, (NPLCL), the Punjab Human Rights Organisation (PHRO) and the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PULCL) and the People's Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR), in the country. Without minimising the significance of their useful work, it is admitted today that their work constitutes a small fraction of the work required to be done in the country.

These organisations function in most vulnerable conditions. The police, security force, the interests and even unsavoury elements are openly hostile and offer determined resistance, with their vast resources at their command, hamper the human rights work at all levels. These organisations mostly undertake selected cases, though in certain very explosive, exceptional conditions such as massacre of Sikhs in Delhi, turbulent conditions in Kashmir, the ethnic riots in Karnataka over water dispute, and some other such violent and sensitive events were investigated with due objectivity, the violations of human rights and brought out their reports indicating and fixing the responsibility on those who were involved in these crimes, though the governments are not moved to any action. No doubt their quality of work is objective and credible yet there is demonstrably no movement in the country in defence of human rights and to thwart such happening in future.

The limited resources, dearth of committed sensitive, concerned, vigilant and devoted activists, the hostile and inhospitable attitude of police and security forces and vested interests besides the colossal ignorance, apathy and cynical indifference of general masses particularly in rural areas, are the major deterrent impediments in their work. The rise of militant movements and particularly the armed ones claiming as liberation movements with or without just foundations not only complicate the scenario but, also actually, add problems and restrain functioning of these organisations.

The State in India though democratic in its public posture and profession, yet highly autocratic in its public nature and profession, yet highly autocratic and oppressive in action may be, because of autocratic traits

inherited from colonial rule and country's heavy past, is simple, insensitive and unconcerned to the implementation and protection of human rights. In such situational reality the talk of human rights at times seems merely an elite's fiat. The irony of the situation is that governments both in the centre and the states, irrespective of party affiliations are determined to discredit and crush these organisations and create all types of hurdles in the work of civil liberties. The proposed H.R.C. is viewed as an other ostensible step to discredit this unpalatable work of these organisations.

Originally the idea of HRC was mooted out by BJP, of course, for quite different purpose to replace it with the defunctious Minority Commission. The Minority Commission in BJP parlance is a standing institution of Congress Party's inexcusable, policy of appeasement of Minorities and especially the Muslim minority. How far the proposed Commission would reflect and accommodate the BJP's perception is yet to emerge, but if the past record of Narasimha Rao government is an indicator, and the support the BJP extended to Rao at all crucial occasions at times of test, both in the parliament and outside, the BJP and Congress perception of H.R.C. is likely to converge as one in the end. Moreover the Congress and BJP have similar and identical views, attitudes and even their records of human rights and such issues.

Both BJP and Congress ruled states, and the governments there have shown little discernable differences in their functioning and violation of human rights on widespread and their treatment of human rights activists. The recent unfortunate death of Sfrin Neegy in mysterious circumstances and mind shattering treatment to Dr. H.D. Sharma by BJP activists of Bastar and similar humiliating treatment to Justice Ajit Singh Balas in Congress ruled state of Punjab amplify the close proximity of Congress and BJP, confirming beyond doubt that the governments of both the parties have neither the requisite sensitivity nor even the rudimentary respect for human rights and constitutional responsibility towards human rights irrespective of their public profession.

The governments in India are unscrupulously destroying the basic fabric of democratic polity. The enactment of black laws such as TADA which simply negates the "Majesty of Rule of Law" and virtually degeneration of

various Statutory bodies and the judicial institutions, the willingness and acquiescence of parliament to grant immense powers to police and security forces, in the name to combat insurgency, militancy and terrorism, as an expediency, at the present, have dangerous inherent perilous possibilities to our very existence as a respectful dignified people.

It also demonstrates the shortsightedness of our present day political elite and their incapacity to resolve the problem in a rational manner as a mature nation. Naturally the proposed H.R.C. in the given environs has to be viewed with discomfiting suspicion. The government may expect favourable pronouncements from the HRC as it has been occurring, such, from the minority commission, to disclaim the international and national public opinion.

In a country like ours with diverse religions, lingual cultural and plural social orders and respectabilities coupled with economic backwardness, the freedom, giving rise to divergent, at times antagonistic expectations and aspirations, is natural and its impact in the minds of different segments of population and its channeling into agitations is an inevitable corollary. These agitations could be peaceful or otherwise and consequent problems are bound to tax the best minds to resolve them. But to delay them as mere law and order problem amounts to deny the people their inherent rights and just fulfilment of legitimate aspirations.

This law and order syndrome led to the enactment of draconian laws, the grant of immense, enormous powers to police and other such agencies, the unjust branding of entire community through smearing and maligning, overt and covert campaigns, to characterize civil liberties as disguised associates of militants and their work as cover to militants activities and consequent massive denial of civil and constitutional rights and injustice to entire segment of population must call for fresh rethinking, at all levels and appropriate resistance by right minded people throughout the country to such pervert thinking.

The continuous denial of constitutional civil liberties which cut at the very roots of our democratic polity and constitution ought to come under the effective purview of the proposed HRC to make state function as custodian of law with due propriety, and to clear the present mess created by ruling political elite, both in the centre and the states as regards the rights of citizens, both individual and collective as community. How far the proposed HRC would be empowered to examine

the whole gamut of these constitutional human rights issues, one cannot predict but if the proposed HRC would have to have any validity and credibility the HRC must be empowered adequately to probe on all such human rights problems.

Since the inception of freedom the Congress party has been in power in the centre with small interruptions of few months twice, naturally Congress men have come to believe that they alone are capable to run the country. This monopolization of power in the single party government has bred arrogance and brahminism and hence the consequent arbitrariness and corruption in the administration. The acrimony between the politician, administrator and the police have wrought havoc as regards constitutional safeguards and to expect from Indian government, as it stands today, to constitute a Commission which would probe into its own acts of commission and commission is a futile and obviously unrealistic thinking that the proposed Commission would provide a viable constitutional media to restore constitutionality and Human rights in India.

The idea of some well meaning intellectuals to welcome the proposed HRC is borne out their immense optimism which in the given situational reality in the country cannot be substantiated as the context in which the HRC is being proposed, comes from the ideas to counteract the vicious propaganda in the Indian governments parlance, of International Human Rights Organizations. As such the proposed HRC, besides discrediting the International Human Rights Organization may fall in the Indian Governments ideas about Human Rights and

civil liberty organisations in India and discredit them also.

There is an immediate need that all the Human Rights Organizations join together to voice their common concern and plan a concerted action to protect themselves, their activists and work from oncoming onslaught by the government. They should collectively express their views about the proposed HRC.

Despite of various polls, the Indian press by and large, have consistently and valiantly stood in the defence of human rights focussing attention and exposing the governments both in the centre and the states on violations of human rights and civil liberties. Most of the activists of human rights organisations are associated with the press and legal profession for obvious reasons, and the International Human Rights Organizations draw heavily on Indian press.

Free Press is the only vehicle left in India today to project and highlight the violations of human rights and to provide an effective protection to individuals and collective rights of communities and organisations. As and when the real intentions of the government are known it is expected that the press would take an appropriate stand to make the proposed HRC as effective institution and organ to protect human rights in India.

P.U.C.I. is first among the human rights organisation in India to let its concerns, views on the proposed HRC in their resolution approved in its National Convention in Bombay early this month. The P.U.C.I. dwelt upon the mode of appointment of members on HRC, on the role, jurisdiction, and has also proposed some preconditions before the HRC is constituted to

allay certain misgivings among the people. This document can be the base or resource paper for further deliberations of various Human Rights Organisations in India as and when they come forward to evolve common attitude and strategy.

There is no likelihood that Indian Government, for its known stance and attitude towards civil liberty groups, would come to invite the civil liberties for consultation on the proposed HRC. Since these civil liberty human rights groups, through their sheer struggle of years, have developed a vital interest and stakes and have earned respectability and significance for their work, though most unrecognized, rather distorted deliberately by the authorities with a perverse concept that protesting activists are agent of militants, cannot afford to jeopardise the gains made so far. They have to be vigilant at this hour, for their own very existence and their work. They need to plan a concerted campaign that the proposed HRC when finally emerges, does not become another mouthpiece of the state, rather it emerges as an effective instrument and institution on which the aggrieved victims of human rights violations can finally fall back.

Historically, the Human Rights idea is the greatest single idea of our age. The Bills of Rights of citizens had found their place in the constitutions from late 18th century onwards. The adoption of Charter of Human Rights in UN constitution and various Conventions relating to it, gave the idea 'Universality' and a fresh Human appeal hitherto unknown in history.

The states of 20th century witnessed it as stimulating significance as worldwide movement, transcending all man-created barriers like physical, political, colour, race, religion, economic and culture encompassing whole mankind. Thanks to the Global awareness about human rights that the victimisations, and denial of human rights anywhere are echoed everywhere in the world. The victims are sympathized and supported morally and the concerned governments are pressed to concede humanitarian treatment, through letters, telegrams etc. Indeed, a dawn of new vision of mankind.

The word of Mr. Xavier Perez de Cuellar, the former Secretary General of United Nations, that "The Principal of non-interference with domestic jurisdiction of the state can not be regarded as protective barrier behind which human rights could be massively and systematically violated with impunity", must find an appropriate expression in our country possible something of that to ensure the independence of the proposed H.R.C.

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RAMJANAM BHOOMI-BABRI MASJID TANGLE

Terrorism in politics

By - AVTAR SINGH 'KOMAL'

In 326 BC Alexander invaded India on the invitation of Ambhi, the King of Taxila, against King Porus. The British could not have established their rule in India without the treason of Mir Jafar. And again India would not have been divided without the dirty role of Jinnah, who once a Congressman propagated two-nation theory. Today our hard-earned freedom is in peril. Similar atmosphere of hatred, sufferings, starvation, fear and exploitation of the voters, once again has appeared every where.

With the exception of the Prime Minister, it is unfortunate we do not have any old guard who unitedly fought the battle of independence and achieved freedom in 1947. "Divide and Rule" is being applied every where by the present selfish leaders. These are the leaders who were allowed free hand to mix Religion and Politics to start Rath Yatra when students were agitating and embracing deaths over Mandal's issue. They proved their selfish motive when this Yatra was stopped. The leader of the Yatra declared "My Rath Yatra was disturbed by the government." The outcome of the "Ekta Yatra" is also known to us. The President of the BJP, with a loud pride challenged to hoist national flag at Srinagar on the national day. This he could do only with the help of Centre. Again this Yatra did not achieve anything worth boasting. Rather, it added fuel to the fire and what is going on in Jammu and Kashmir is before us. These leaders are making selfish efforts to create more vote-banks, ultimately to grab power at the centre. There are the open efforts for "Kissa Karsi Ki".

Crimes of rupees would have been spent on these non-issues. After 45 years since our independence, the number of people below the poverty line, have increased. It is a matter of shame that people are starving to death and women are selling their babies for as little as Rs. 20. Since there is no code of conduct for the ministers and the politicians, they are multiplying their fortunes.

Ram Janambhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute is over 300 years old. When it could not be solved in 45 years since independence, BJP and their allied parties dare not expect a magic from the Prime Minister and Supreme Court. The conflicting and desperate statements of these parties, including those recently made by the UP Chief Minister (Keep off Ayodhya) has poison-

ed the atmosphere beyond control. Ayodhya is burning today and the latest verdict of the Supreme Court, allowing "Symbolic Kar Seva—only Bhajan and Kirtan" does not sound to be Supreme, except that it may cool the tempers. The U.P. government must accept and implement the Court's verdict.

The workers of BJP and allied parties, including the Sadhus, should not be allowed to enter the disputed area for performing Bhajan and Kirtan to avoid bloodshed. Possibly entering into the disputed area amounts to terrorism and should not be allowed under any circumstances. The voters should also raise their voice and appeal to the leadership to honour the Court's decision. Let us not become a laughing stock. Let us prove to the world that we are worthy citizens of free India. Ayodhya is not the personal property of these parties. This is a national issue and must be decided to the best interest of the whole nation.

The best solution should be to declare the disputed area "A national monument" and Rama's Temple be constructed at another appropriate place. Actually the whole of Ayodhya is a holy place. Those who talk of Ram Raja and Ram's Temple they cannot bring Ram Raja. For that let us first clean our minds. Maryada Purshottam Ram avoided war of succession among four brothers, peacefully accepted the decision of parents and went to the forest for fourteen long years. The need of the hour is not hot tempers,

but love, compassion, humility, and feeling of fraternity in order to remove hatred from the two ancient and large communities involved.

"Mao" was worshipped by the Chinese as the crusader of the world's first guerrilla State during Cultural Revolution in China. "Ayatollah Khomeini" created the first "Mullah State" in Iran. However, in the course of time sense prevailed and both these countries have changed course. The leaders and rulers of these countries have realised that modern states can be created through democratic ways. India emerged as a Socialist and democratic Republic 40 years back, with a written Constitution. "Atheism" has found a fertile soil in this country.

Cool mind with compassion and conceptual restatement of BJP outlook would be helpful on this vexed question of the place of religion in politics. Leaders have to put their immediate concern in a redefined perspective. In his keynote address in Bhopal in the Dr. Rajendra Prasad Memorial Series: 1992, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee spoke on "Secularism: The Indian Concept". He said as under:

"It spread out to be an erudite treatise on the place of religion in a modern state. The concept of equal rights, equal opportunities, and equal respect for all religions and all citizens is the essence of secularism which must form the basis of the Indian Republic".

The above speech, on the whole, will hopefully have impact on the BJP rank. To some extent it seeks to rebut the criticism of the party as a vehicle of rank Hindu communalism. But we cannot say anything as to how much truth is there in the above

statement. If the BJP is to establish itself as a truly national party, it must demonstrate its will and capacity to rise above sectarian passions, which it preached and practised during 1951 election when they forced Hindu Purajaks to declare Hindi as their mother tongue.

It is pity that biased historians have started distorting historical facts. When Babar invaded India, there was blood shed and destruction in Punjab. Guru Nanak, the revolutionary saint raised his voice against tyranny of Babar. During course of their arguments, Babar took an oath that he would not demolish any temple or trouble innocent people. Earlier the modern historian said that there was a Ram's temple at the disputed place and now it is understood that they have submitted facts that there was Shiva's temple. Let it be clear to BJP that if they are dreaming to have a BJP government at the Centre, they cannot rule India without the support of the minorities. The government should also take timely measures not to allow these parties to mix religion with politics to avoid criticism of double standard.

Mr Advani's statement in Varanasi that Kar Seva would be done with "sticks and shovels" and would not end until Ram temple was completely built and Ashok Singhal's warning to the centre are hardly compatible with Mr Kalyan Singh's unequivocal undertaking to the Supreme Court that only symbolic Kar Seva would take place in Ayodhya on the acquired disputed land on December 6. Even RSS General Secretary, Mr H.V. Seshadri has said that kar seva will not violate Court's orders. There is no doubt that delay in settling these civil matters has contributed to the tension and conflicts over Ayodhya. Hence, the centre and the State Government must take all measures to implement Court's verdict.

Until the next general election, Mandal issue will remain on the top. The voters must judge the party on the basis of its performance and should not be seduced by "Hindu pride". Here I give one example of their so-called performance. Uttar Pradesh Government were granted the largest grant of over Rs 500 crores by the USAID for family planning. Had they utilised this money for the purpose it was granted, half the country's population problems would have been over by now. So far, the BJP government has done nothing. Is this not more important than Mandal?

This article was written few days before the black Sunday (6th December '92).

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Expulsion of Jagmeet Singh Bains

Sir, - I was utterly disgusted to learn about the expulsion of Sarder Jagmeet Singh Brar for six years from the Congress. Shri N.V. Gadgil, general secretary AICC had pointed out that the PCC president was not competent to expel a member of parliament.

It is surprising that in this so called largest democracy of the world such heinous games are being played by the leadership of the party in power. After all, what wrong is committed if a prominent member like Jagmeet Singh had highlighted the Sikh community's grievances and offered sound and logical suggestions for resolving the ticklish issues hanging fire for the last decade or so.

It is pitiable to note that the Congress leadership can not tolerate anything like pitting a spade a spade by right-thinking

member of its party. Not only Sarder Brar but earlier also some prominent members of Parliament have been suggesting Mr Rao to take an earnest step to visit Punjab. Even the Chief Minister Sarder Beant Singh had himself uttered many a time that the Prime Minister had decided to visit Punjab and announce the "Package deal". Were these utterances made in the air only not for the consumption of the Punjab people?

Is it just and fair to repeatedly talk about Punjab being in the grip of law and order disorder, as Sarder Beant Singh has been doing? If it was so, why so much time on resolving major issues like Chandigarh, distribution of river waters, exchange of certain linguistic territories etc was wasted? What was the need of devoting so much time and

energy on implementing the Rajiv-Longowal Pact?

In any case, in my view it is a great mockery of the democracy if we impose a ban on members of a particular party to have a freedom of speech. How could such steps be counted as anti-party activities? If that is the case who should speak truth? Is it only the job of members of the opposition to bring to light the truth and party in power should always be bound to blindly follow the whip, whether rightly or wrongly issued.

Personally I feel that the expulsion of Sarder Brar was most unjustified, as it has exposed the biased mind of the PCC. In fact for the smooth running of the democratic system of government we need such members who could muster up courage and call a spade a spade, as Sarder Brar had quitted himself.

—G.S. Chadha

New Delhi.

OBITUARY

KAILASH KAUR



Sardar Kailash Kaur, wife of Professor Harbans Singh, the known Sikh savant and the Editor-in-Chief of the Encyclopaedia of Sikhism in preparation at the Punjabi University, Patiala, passed away on 12 November 1992.

An epitome of humility, compassion and affection, the Sardarai was a true Sikh in her personal life. Born on 23 April 1924 in a Bawa Khatri family, she took her school education at Ludhiana and Ferozepore and graduated from Government Rajindra College, Bathinda. She was married to Professor Harbans Singh on 23 April 1944 who was then the Head of the Department of English at Brijindra College, Faridkot.

The charming personality and winsome manners of Mrs Kailash Kaur won over everyone who came in contact with the family. It was either her perfect understanding of human psyche or her own inherent goodness that she could easily establish a rapport with her neighbours and the friends and colleagues of her husband. It may sound strange, but it remains a fact that none addressed her with the formal honourific of Madam and very few as Mrs Harbans Singh; she was Di'ji to some, Bhai'ji to others, and Kailash Bhai'ji to a few close friends.

She is survived, besides her husband, by a son (Dr Nripinder Singh, the author of the widely-acclaimed book *The Sikh Moral Tradition*) and a daughter (Dr Gurninder Kaur, a teacher at the Colby College in the US and an author of numerous research articles and books).

We pray to Akal Paarak that He grants peace to the noble, departed soul and strength and fortitude to Professor Harbans Singh and their children to bear this grievous loss.

—Dharam Singh
Punjabi University, Patiala.

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First Sikh Archive to be established at Paonta Sahib

The Sikh Archive Movement has gained momentum and leading role has been played by Sardar Manohar Singh Marco through the establishment of Marcos (Research) Foundation. Contributing over 30 years of his research and collection of old valuable manuscripts and documents and donating part of his income, he has laid the foundation. The board of trustees includes Sardar Manohar Singh Marco; Sardar Rupinder Singh; Sardar Tejinder Singh; Mrs Gaganjit Kaur; Dr Giani Bhajan Singh; Dr Man Singh Nirankari of Amritsar; Dr Rattan Singh Jaggi of Patiala and Sardar Gurmukh Singh Chodha.

For the management of the Foundation, a committee has been constituted with Sardar Manohar Singh Marco as the Chairman, Sardar Gurmukh Singh Chodha as the Vice Chairman, Giani Bhajan Singh as the Joint Secretary.

The first meeting of the Foundation was held at the office of the Foundation located at C-455 Naraina Industrial Area I, New Delhi-110 028. The meeting commenced after the Ardes (Sach Prayer) in the presence of Sri Gura Granth Sahib. The aims and objects of the Foundation were laid out by the Chairman of the Board of Trustees.

The Marcos (Research) Foundation has prepared the inventory of the invaluable collections and decided to appoint a curator. The invitations keen on establishing the Sikh Archives will be provided all the necessary help and co-operation (through a subcommittee consisting of Dr. Rattan Singh Jaggi, Giani Bhajan Singh, Sardar Gurmukh Singh Chodha and Sardar Rupinder Singh).

In the meeting it was also decided that Marcos (Research) Foundation help in establishing four Sikh archives and the following four places were proposed.

Gurdwara Paonta Sahib, Amritsar, New Delhi and at a place outside India. A subcommittee was formed to finalize the proposal.

Subsequent to this meeting a proposal was drafted and a meeting was held at Gurdwara Paonta Sahib with the Gurdwara President and honourable Sikhs of the area, who offered all kinds of co-operation and financial help for this grandiose venture at a spot where Gura Gobind Singh Jee Maharaj scathed his historical writings. In the meantime on the report of sub-committee it was decided that the foundation should co-operate with Gurdwara Committee Paonta Sahib in establishing the first Sikh Archive at Paonta

Sahib.

Foundation further authorized Sardar Manohar Singh Marco to approach Sikh community settled in U.K., U.S.A. and Canada to start the archives in any one of these countries.

The task of the foundation is

Harnam Singh Shan Honoured

Mr K.R. Narayanan, Vice-President of India has been pleased to nominate Dr. Harnam Singh Shan as a Senator of the Punjab University, Chandigarh, in his capacity as its Chancellor.

Dr Shan served the Punjab University for 36 years, almost since its inception in 1948, firstly as the Editor of its publications and thereafter as the initiator and head of its Postgraduate Department of Punjabi Studies. He retired in 1984 as the Chairman of its Guru Nanak Chair and Professor and Head of the Department of Sikh Studies.

Soon after his retirement from the University service, Prof. Shan was offered the Professorship Emeritus of the All India Radio and Doordarshan by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, with his headquarters at Chandigarh. The University Grants Commission appointed him as the Principal Project Investigator of a Major Research Project in Humanities and Social Sciences bearing on research in Sikh Studies. The Indian Council for Historical Research has recently honoured him with its Senior Fellowship.

Dr Shan is associated with a large number of regional, national and international academic, literary, religious and cultural bodies, such as the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain, London which nominated him as its Fellow and the Guru Nanak Foundation, New Delhi which elected him as its former Vice-President. He has contributed significantly to many academic and cultural functions, national and international conferences, specific seminars and symposia

in microfilm or computerize all the available Sikh history and research and store copies at these four centers where the historians and scholars would continue their research in the Sikh history. In this context the foundation would be approaching Scholars, Societies and Universities to exchange historical records and manuscripts handwritten in the last five centuries.



held from time to time in and outside India.

Dr Shan has already produced scores of books, papers and monographs on Indian lore and literature as well as on Punjab, Panjabi and Sikh Studies. He is at present engaged in the accomplishment of various research projects. His stupendous effort in preparing a standard Dictionary of Sikhism and critical edition of Bhagat's *Panji Parkash* is in progress. His research work on the iconography of Gura Granth Sahib and a scholarly monograph on a great Sikh poet of Punjab are under active publication.

Prof. Shan's continued association with the Punjab University, now as a member of its supreme decision making body, will not only prove an asset for our alma mater but will also be quite beneficial for the promotion of academic pursuits and research in Panjabi, Panjabi and Sikh Studies here and elsewhere.

Amnesty Is Not Biased

By: ANITA TRESSEN,
Amnesty International
London (U.K.)

We would like to clarify that we were told during our recent visit to Delhi that the Government is considering our long-standing request to visit states outside the Capital. As yet, however, we have not been given permission to visit the Kashmir and Punjab or, for that matter, any other states in which the Government does not face organised armed opposition. Indeed, some particularly brutal instances of custodial violence were reported during our recent visit to the Capital. In Haryana a 23-year-old Haryana was captured by the police and in New Delhi one man died in police custody.

We welcome the opportunity given to us by the Government to discuss our concerns directly with officials and gain a greater understanding about the important legal and other measures the Government is considering to take to curb violations of human rights. This has a fundamental importance in opening a dialogue with the Government about human rights protection and we hope this will be followed by a positive response from the Government to our outstanding request to visit various Indian states, our most immediate concern being Kashmir. In our recent discussions with the Government, we did point out that our current inability to assess the situation for ourselves on the ground prevents us from gaining a deeper understanding of the realities of the situation there, however meticulously we try to carry out our research. Indeed, regular visits to this and other states by international organisations such as the Amnesty would prevent an impression gaining ground that the Government has something to hide.

The claim that Amnesty does little to expose human rights violations by western governments. This is not true. In the past year alone we have stepped up our campaigning on three "human rights scandals" in the US: The death penalty, police brutality, and the treatment of Haitian asylum-seekers. In the UK we have issued major reports on the crisis in confidence in human rights standards and ill-treatment under anti-terrorism legislation in Northern Ireland, both of which led to strong international criticism of the Government. And as I write, Amnesty members are engaged in a major campaign to protest the ongoing human rights violations in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

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Attack On Media On Black Sunday

The media was the target of the protagonists of *Hindus* who pulled down the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya on December 6. The following reports in *The Statesman*, and *The Pioneer*, filed by eyewitnesses and those subjected to the attacks by the kar sevaks, expose real character of the miscreants who stormed into the Babri Masjid and razed it to the ground. The first report, by *The Statesman's* Staff Correspondent, appeared in the December 7 issue of the daily; while the second, by Praveen Jain, was published in *The Pioneer* (December 8).

Taste Of Kar Sevaks' Fury

With policemen reduced to the role of bystanders, and occasionally being as cheerleaders, the media bore the brunt of the kar sevaks' fury in Ayodhya on Sunday. Photographers, in particular, were at the receiving end with many having been beaten up, some ending up badly injured. Photographic equipment was snatched, damaged and thrown on the ground, and reels exposed. It was almost as if the BJP-VHP-RSS Bajrang Dal cadres knew they had done something the world was better off not seeing.

Signs of the media being a likely target were available the previous day itself. A senior leader of the Hindu mobline, Paramhans Ramchandra Das, announced at a public meeting "patrakarun ko apne dharme badalw kunge" (the media will have to change its perception). Ashok Singhal of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad had gone a step further in accusing some media organisations of "misreporting". Others who have been making provocative statements against the media include Vinay Katiyar and Acharya Dharmendra.

Ramesh Chaud, of *Filmfare* was hit on the head and had to get 16 stitches. Pablo Bartholomew, representing a French agency, received serious head injuries and had to be rushed to hospital.

Several reporters, including the representatives of *The Statesman*, were the target of attack of kar sevaks on a roof-top who tried to hit them with stones and even boulders. The refrain of the kar sevaks was that journalists should stop reporting.

Mark Lally of the BBC was taken to a room and threatened he would be killed if he persisted with "making false broadcasts" about the Ayodhya situation. Lally had to seek police protection. Peter Heine of the *Voice of America* was similarly roughed up.

When the storming began at 11.50 AM, a group of eight reporters and all the photographers were at the spot where the kar sevaks were assembled. Other media representatives were on the roof of the Manas Bhawan, the headquarters of the VHP situated next to the scene of action.

As the mob surged forward, the kar sevaks turned on photographers with almost the same degree of ferocity they were to show soon at the mosque. In the first wave of assaults, the team of Parulkar, a Doordashan programme, were picked upon. Both the reporter and cameraman were hit with lathis.

Then it was the turn of other photographers. Among those who were snatched or had photographic equipment snatched or damaged were Praveen Jain, Pramod Pushkarna, Tapsa, Nitin Rai, Sanjay Sharma, T Narayan and Alek Mitra.

Seeing the police unresponsive and the kar sevaks unmanageable, many journalists had to seek refuge in a small temple behind the mosque.

Those at Manas Bhawan fared little better. The RSS volunteers posted there were openly contemptuous of the media, making jeering remarks and quite evidently enjoying the discomfiture being caused by the rampaging mob. When journalists tried to leave the spot, they were jostled and pushed. Some of the volunteers were heard remarking that journalists should be lynched.

There were reports of an attempt by some RSS men to push photographer off the ledge of a building.

'Hindus Giving Hinduism A Bad Name'

If you think the demolition of the Babri Masjid was a spontaneous one, then bear this. On Saturday afternoon a BJP Member of Parliament forewarned me of the events to follow on Sunday.

He smiled as he directed me to the spot where the kar sevaks were rehearsing how to bring down the 465 year old structure. The kar sevaks, with ropes and rods, had a rock pile and were logging at it from different directions. As events turned out later, this was the very manner in which three copies of the mosque were brought down the next day.

Near the mosque, a concrete dam had been erected. Hordes of kar sevaks from several directions were periodically rushing towards the dam. This was the run-up to Sunday afternoon.

December 6

Early on Sunday we made our way to the spot where the BJP-VHP combine was expected to carry out the "symbolic" kar sevka. All photographers, journalists and cameramen were directed to a *dianmushala* (Manas Bhawan) the terrace had been cleared for us.

As events moved forward the Bajrang Dal activist souped up onto the terrace. Their numbers increased till we were outnumbered. Seeing trouble, I slipped away.

It was a sensible move, as I realised later. The journalists and camera crew who stayed back were pulled and jostled around, their movie cameras were smashed away and flung down from the terrace five floors above the ground.

On the ground there were thousands of people milling around. They were all chanting "Jai Shree Ram". They converged on me. Even though I was caught unaware I managed to get away from the spot. Somewhere in the mob snatched at my open bag. Later I realised that the kar sevaks

had made off with Rs 2500.

Even as the crowd chased me, its attention was caught by another hapless photographer who was literally shooting from the hip as he ran. The mob set upon him giving me a fleeting opportunity to move towards the dam where the BJP-VHP leaders were seated. On the way I met two other photographers—Nitin Rai and Pablo Bartholomew. On the spur of the moment we decided there might be safety in numbers and were glued together in fear.

By then the border had swarmed up the domes and they fell upon it with *trishuls* and whatever else they had in their hands.

It would have been unthinkable not to get this on film, even if this was the last thing we did. But since our camera and we got clicking. This focussed attention on us. Kar sevaks armed with *trishuls* and daggers chased us. I was luckier than the other two who were nabbed, stabbed and beaten.

Later that night journalists who managed to get away from the site told us the mosque had been turned to rubble.

December 7

Early in the day, sporting a white bandana, printed entirely with the word "Ram" and wearing saffron sweaters and carrying only a minimum of photo equipment in our pockets we made our way stealthily to the complex.

Kar sevaks were clearing the rubble to make way for some sort of a structure. To take pictures from so near would have been suicidal. Through a small window of a house in the vicinity I squeezed the shutter six times.

I breathed freely. Not outside the house. Not in Faizabad—12 kilometres away. Not on the right bank. But at the office when the prints came out fine.

They were the pictures of Hindus giving Hinduism a bad name. I am ashamed.



Amnesty International Must Visit Punjab Without Delay

Policemen Committing Crimes Are Rarely Disciplined

Amnesty International, the London-based world renowned body to safeguard human rights which has consultative status with the United Nations, must visit Punjab to ferret out the truth about how Sikhs, men, women and children, are being humiliated and tortured. Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao is a hypocrite because he showed sympathy for Ms. Benazir Bhutto when the Pakistan government maltreated her during a recent protest march in that country but he has turned a blind eye to hundreds of innocent Sikh women being tortured and molested by the police in our Punjab. According to SGPC President Gurcharan Singh Tohra, there is not much difference between the South African white government's subhuman treatment of the blacks and the centre's attitude towards Sikhs in Punjab. He has cited specific cases to bolster up his argument.

After dogged refusal extended over several years, New Delhi rulers allowed a four-member team, led by AI's former secretary-general Ian Martin, to visit New Delhi last month and hold discussions with the central leaders. But the team was not allowed to meet senior police and paramilitary personnel.

The government is keen to get a clean bill from a body recognised by the United Nations and held in great esteem by most countries of the world. It was able to put across its viewpoints during discussions with AI team and was able to get the assurance that in future the AI would condemn as much the militant groups' excesses, especially killing of innocents and taking of hostages, as violations of human rights by the government forces. But the government has to do much more, especially over custodial deaths, before it can get AI off its back. And this is going to be a big haul.

Union Home Minister S.B. Chavan has agreed to allow AI to visit Punjab to investigate allegations of human rights violations on a "case-in-case basis". If AI is honest in its approach and meticulous in its research, as it has always been, its findings cannot be essentially different from the reports which appear in Indian newspapers with such regularity. Indeed, this would make it difficult for AI to play a partisan role or tailor its reports for ulterior motives. If it does so, it would automatically stand exposed.

The new decision is welcome inasmuch as lack of access to Punjab did not stop Amnesty International from publishing reports "documenting" the violation of human rights in the unfortunate state. At the worst, allowing the AI team to visit the

militancy-affected areas, will lead to a sharper denunciation of the Indian state. But this is something which the powers-that-be should be able to tackle without much difficulty, if they are determined to redress their steps and respect human life and dignity.

Police brutality continues as usual in the beleaguered state. Policemen committing crimes are rarely disciplined. They must be treated like common criminals which they are, charge-sheeted, tried and speedily put behind jail locks. There is no other deterrence to a police state which Punjab has been reduced to.

World Punjabi Conference Postponed

The fourth World Punjabi Conference scheduled for December 26, 27 and 28 this year, has been postponed till March next year, keeping in view the disturbed conditions in India, and many other parts of the world, from where a sizable number of delegates, were expected to participate. The decision was taken on 12th December, 1992 at an emergency meeting of the extended Executive Committee of the Conference, chaired by Shri H.S. Hanspal.

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